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BOOK MARKETING: HOW TO GET BOOK REVIEWS Interview with Debbie Drum

Susan Friedmann: Welcome to Book Marketing Mentors, the weekly podcast where you learn proven strategies, tools, ideas, and tips from the masters. Every week, I introduce you to a marketing master who will share their expertise to help you market and sell more books. Today, my special guest mentor of the week is internet marketing and book publishing expert Deborah Drum.

She helps small businesses create awesome copy and content to market their business. She's been marketing online since 2010 and loves working with marketers to better their businesses and sell their products and services online. She's created over 50 of her own content marketing products, and I'm excited to have her join us as this week's guest expert and mentor. Debbie, welcome to the show.

Debbie Drum: Thank you so much. I'm very happy to be here.

Susan Friedmann: I'm happy to have you here, and I know that one of your specialty areas is helping authors understand how to get book reviews, so let's delve into that subject because I know that authors are just like wanting to know more about how to get reviewed. Let's start with, how important are book reviews?

Debbie Drum: Oh my gosh. They're so important, and it's mainly because we live in this social proof kind of world right now, right? We can't or we don't want to do anything without seeing other people's experiences. How did they experience what we wish to experience, so that we don't waste our time, right? We have so much great ... Anything that we want to do pretty much is at our fingertips, so if I wanted to go to my TV right now and watch any TV show I want, I could.

That's how amazing this world we live in right now, right? But I want to ... so that I don't waste my time, I want to see what other people have said about the potential shows that I want to watch before I get into it, right? I have the ability to do that. I can go online. I can read reviews just about anything that ... before I purchase.

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For instance, like before you buy ... before you eat at a restaurant, what do you do? You go, and you go on Yelp, and you see, “How was the food? How was the staff? Was it clean? Did they come out on time? What kind of issues did you have eating there?” Right? Because we have so many different choices. What kind of Thai food do you want? I have 3 Thai food restaurants within like 5 miles of my house, so that’s one of the ways I’m going to choose what I’m going to do is by reading reviews.

Hotels. I can’t tell you. I will never ever stay in a hotel without reading reviews because ... Let’s just say that I want to avoid little critters in my hotel bed, and there will be people who would definitely complain about stuff if there’s an issue to complain about, right? My point is it’s not just with books. With everything that we do before we buy something, we want to see that it’s okay. We want to get that pat on the back saying, “Hey, it’s okay if you go through with this because I’ve lived this experience, and it’s great, and I’m going to give it a thumbs up.”

That doesn’t mean that you need to read a hundred reviews for that justification before you buy something, right? If there are no reviews or if there is one review, that’s not a good sign because that means that not enough people have tested it out, tested the waters for you to feel okay with your purchase. If we just translate that over to books, it’s the same exact concept because people will share their experiences, and we want to see that as buyers good, bad, or indifferent.

I’m not saying that every single book publisher needs all 5-star reviews. I’m not saying that at all, but they need that number at least in the double digits to feel okay and confident that that will definitely increase book sales, so it’s so important to have them.

Susan Friedmann: Excellent. As you were saying that, it was going through my mind, and I’m thinking. “Yes, that’s exactly what I do.” I go on Netflix, and if it doesn’t have 4 stars at least or if I go on Audible and if 4 stars, and the same with hotels, so you’re absolutely right, but how do we get those reviews? It’s like I know I have so many authors come to me and say, “Well, I’m going to put my book on Amazon, but how do I get people to review it?” What would you advise?

Debbie Drum: Sure. There’s actually a lot of different ways that we can get reviews, and not every single way is the best way, and not every single way is easy, and not every single way is actually ... complies with Amazon’s terms of service, so we have to be careful with this as well. The very first

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way that I recommend, and it's actually the easiest is to a couple. Scatter like 1 or 2 requests inside of your book asking people to leave you a review because if you don't ask, you're not going to get.

Now, it is true that when a person finishes your book, they ... Amazon will give like a little message up again, "Will you please rate your experience?" We don't want to rely only on Amazon when it comes to asking people for reviews, so what we want to do is we add ... We want to add like 1 to 2 places in our book, maybe in the beginning, maybe in the end to say, "Hey, I would love to hear your feedback on what you thought of this book. I love to hear feedback. I want to make improvements with anything that you might suggest."

Whatever it is, just be honest with people and just say that you would love to hear their feedback because people aren't just going to do that automatically for the most part. There's a very small percentage of people that will just do that, especially if they had a good experience. Most of the time, people are writing reviews when they have a bad experience unfortunately. Without being prompted that is, so that's the first thing is if you want, you have to ask. That's number one.

Number two, something that you can do, but you got to really try lightly with this, and I'm sure that you've done this before. I've done it too a million times, right? We ask our friends, we ask our family to go ahead, and buy our books, and leave us a review. Now, this is okay up to a certain point. Let's say you have 20 books. You can't ask the same people over, and over, and over again to review your book as Amazon is somehow going to catch on with that, and they're going to start deleting reviews because this is how people abuse the system, right?

Amazon is really after finding those like fake reviews. Unfortunately, even though they might be a real review that you might be getting, it's not 100% honest, right, because those people didn't find your book naturally, didn't naturally go ahead and leave you a review. That strategy is okay up to a certain point, and then you just have to be careful because Amazon might start deleting those reviews, so even strategy, which is age-old, doesn't always work.

Let me talk about a strategy that you should not do. If you ever see this recommended, make sure you run the other way, and that is review swapping like there are some like organizations or companies, whatever you want to call them that have like reviewing based on a credit system where, "Okay. You'll review my book. I'll review your book. You get so

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many credits if you review this many books, and then with these credits, you'll get reviewers for your blog." This is absolutely against Amazon's terms of service. Don't do it.

Along this same line is reaching out to people in Facebook groups and Facebook communities. It's not really review swapping so to speak, but sometimes, it is. Just be very, very careful. There are times that you can go into a Facebook group and say, "Hey, my book is free. Can you go ahead, and download it, and leave me a review?" A lot of the times, that's fine, but again, that's a very, very tedious process, and the novelty of that is over.

When I started publishing books in 2011, these Facebook groups were fairly new. Everyone was pretty excited to leave each other reviews. Now, everyone is just way too busy like, "I'm sorry, but I don't want to read a book on the best way to groom my cat. I'm just like ... I'm way too busy. I have no time for that." The goal is to try your best to find real reviewers, right? That's the goal, and that's the challenge, and that's what I figured out how to do if you ... I don't know if we're up to that yet or if you have more questions pertaining to what we talked about, Susan.

Susan Friedmann: Yes, finding real reviewers is a challenge as you say. I know that many people have said, "Go and find people who review lots of books online, and write to them, and ask them whether they'd be willing to review your book," but give us your formula for finding real reviewers.

Debbie Drum: Right. Just to touch on what you just said, Susan, that is a strategy too where you can like reach out to those top Amazon 1,000 reviewers. That's not the best strategy either unfortunately because those are targeted reviewers either because those people, they're not interested in every single topic. They're only interested in what they want to read, and a lot of times, they're bombarded with requests that they'll probably just never get around to your request, and if they do, they might deny you anyway because that's not the topic that they review books in.

The best kind of book reviews to get are from people who actually review books in your niche. I got this idea one day because I write in a fiction niche. I don't have a lot of fiction books, but I write in the fiction niche that I stay private. I don't tell anyone that I'm in this niche. It's completely separate from my business, and it's a completely different pen name, so I like to keep that private, which is another reason why

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the whole Facebook thing didn't work for me because I didn't want to reveal who my pen name was.

It's an embarrassing niche, and it's like, "All right. I don't need to be sharing this with the world." Right? I'm sure you know those kind of niches, right? That's why I was like ... One day, I just sat back. I'm like, "How am I going to get reviews because I can't reach out to my own network?" It's like starting from scratch, right? Inside of Amazon, if you go to books related to your topic or any book on Amazon let's just say, there's actually ... With the number of reviews in that book, in that book listing, that's a hyperlink.

A hyperlink is just a link, and you could go in, and you could actually see everybody who has reviewed those books in your niche, right? There are some books that have thousands of reviews, and I was like, "Hmm, why can't I just reach out to those people who have reviewed other books in my niche? Wouldn't those people be the best people to reach out to because they're already interested in the topic, right? Why can't I contact them?"

As I was doing a little bit more digging, I found that there was only a ... like out of like a thousand people, there's only a very small percentage of those people who actually are on Amazon, and they have a contact information to be able to contact them if I wanted to, so most people don't have contact information on their accounts. These reviewers, most of them, you can't reach out to them because there's no way you can. There's no like messaging system inside of Amazon. See, Amazon ... Every buyer has a buyer profile. You have one. I have one.

Amazon doesn't do the best ... They don't do the best job at giving us information about our profile. We just have to stumble upon it, right? There are settings in there that we can change, and one of them is our contact information. We could put our email, and we could put our website, and a very, very small percentage of people have that website and have that email filled in.

As I was looking and going through these hundreds of thousands of reviewers, I was like, "This is insane. I can't be doing this all day. If I wanted to hire an outsourcer to do this, I probably could, but that would cost me an arm and a leg because I would just need a full-time person to scour these reviewers to see which ones have contact information, and it would probably not pay off, right?"

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I needed to think of a better way, and that's when I said, "Hey, I know that there are folks that write software that work with Amazon to extract data." Amazon lets you do this. Surprisingly enough, they have what's called an "API," and that API can feed you information. That was ... When did that ...? That was like 3 years ago. Actually, 4 years ago now because it's 2016 when I thought of the idea.

Last year, I built ... I worked with a brilliant programmer to build a software that I called "Book Review Targeter," and that's exactly what it does. It goes through every single reviewer for a specific book and weeds out their contact information, so everybody else who doesn't have contact information gets kicked out, and the ones that do, we get to compile in a very short period of time automatically as opposed to manually within minutes versus hours, days maybe, and we have a list of people, targeted people that we can contact and send a very friendly message saying, "Hey, I saw that you reviewed this book in this niche. I have a book that's similar that you would probably love. Would you like to review my book?"

That's it. It's a very friendly message. We're not doing anything spam-y. We're not selling anything. We're not getting them to opt in to anything. It's just a message asking them for a review, and the feedback that my users are getting from just doing this simple task is incredible, and it's very exciting because it makes such a daunting task of feeling like you're in a place where you have to beg and plead for review where now, you're finding people who are thrilled to read your book, especially if they can get it for free and it's in a topic that they love.

They've written reviews about their topic before, and now, they could ... Now, they can review your book for you. It's just like this happy situation, and you're not in a position where it's like you feel bad or you feel like you're asking something that's dreadful. That's why it's super exciting.

Susan Friedmann: It certainly is, and I know that I purchased it and haven't put it to use yet, but I'm about to. Let me ask you. Do any of these reviewers want to be paid for their services?

Debbie Drum: That's absolutely against Amazon's terms of service. If they do, then just pass them by and just ignore them, or you can say, "No, I cannot give you any compensation," because that's one of the things that Amazon is really, really cracking down on. Even more than the friends and family thing is paid reviews, and they will enforce legal action when necessary,

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so it's not ... Not to be threatening, but you are putting your account at risk if you do pay for any type of review, so just don't do it.

Susan Friedmann: How would they know? How would they know that you paid for that review just as a matter of interest?

Debbie Drum: Specifically, people are using sites like Fiber, so Amazon is going on Fiber. That's Fiber.com, and you could put listings, and people are saying, "Hey, I'll review your book for \$5. Sure, no problem." Amazon is finding out that way, and there are just other ways that I don't even know that they're finding out, but it's just not worth it because I've never dove into that because I don't want to put my account at risk.

Susan Friedmann: Yeah. No. It's just interesting that this is crying out possibly for people to do that. If you approach these people, and you say, "Hey, I see that you've done reviews in this same niche, would you be willing to do one of mine?" Really, if they say yes, all you're doing is sending them a book and saying thank you. Is that it? Do you follow up? What's the process here?

Debbie Drum: Right. After you contact them, the best way to do it is when ... If you're ever running like KDP Select free promotional days, so Amazon, if you're in the KDP Select Program, you get 5 promotional days where you can have your book for free within a 90-day period. They give you five. Doing this around the book promotion is probably the best way to do it because then, that person can download your book for free, and it would also look like a verified purchase when they actually do write their review, so that's the first thing.

The second thing is a lot of the times too, we just step, stop, and step back for a second and see exactly what we're doing here is we're making this personal now, right? This is not ... Sure, we are reaching out to a lot of people, but think about what you're doing. Notice that you're reaching out to a person that could become a fan of yours. This person can be a huge influencer. A lot of these reviewers run book clubs. A lot of these reviewers have review sites of their own where with a click of a button, they can get in front of thousands of people, right?

Some of these reviewers have blogs that they just write book reviews all day long. A lot of these people are not looking for anything monetary in return. A lot of these people ... I call them "influencers." Basically, they want to share cool stuff with their friends. They're not marketers. They are just people who want to help. They want to look smart to their

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friends. They want to make their friends laugh. They want to share cool stuff with their friends. That's who these people are.

That's the core of these people, and that's why this is such an effective method because we're not reaching out to other marketers. We're not reaching out to other book publishers or saying, "Hey, what's in this for me?" No. Just regular people, so getting social connection with those people. Staying in contact with them every time you need more feedback or you write another book. These are the type of things that you want to do like keep it real like that's what we're doing here. It's not like anything fancy. It's just simple personal one-on-one connections that you're building with people that could potentially take your book to the next level.

Susan Friedmann: Also, doing that, you have to be willing I'm assuming to have them be honest about it, and it doesn't necessarily mean that they're going to write you a review that you feel good about, but it's an honest review, so you've got to be open to that. Correct?

Debbie Drum: That is true. Although, my software, it does show the number of star reviews that that person left in the other book. If that person is like leaving 1-star reviews everywhere on Amazon, you probably don't want to reach out to them in the first place. Number two, yes. You're right. You don't want to ask for a 5-star review either, and you don't want all 5-star reviews.

Remember, a lot of times, think about your own purchasing habits and think about books that you see that have like 25 reviews, even 20 reviews. Maybe even 15. Do you read every single review? Come on. You don't. The point is, is that you want to mostly go for volume, but you also want pretty ... You want decent to great reviews, and you know that if you're getting bad reviews, then you know that there's an issue with your content, right?

Susan Friedmann: You're right. It's like I usually read maybe half a dozen of the good reviews, and then I look at the ultra-negatives, the 1, 2-star reviews. I want to see what they said, and based on what they said, I'm going to weigh up. "Well, do they have a gripe? Is this really ... How honest is this?" Then, make that decision. Yeah. That's important information. You did mention something earlier, and I think it'd be good to explain to our listeners what that is, and that's the KDP, and they may not necessarily be familiar with that term. Would you like to explain a little bit about that?

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Debbie Drum: When you publish a book to Kindle, you could enroll in what's called the "KDP Select Program." That allows you to have 5 promotional days within a 90-day period, and that means that your book could be free for those 5 days, and they could be sprinkled throughout that 90-day period. You could run two at a time, 2 days at a time, and then sprinkle them out throughout.

The benefits of that is that people can just be introduced to your book. They could ... and download your book for free and be interested ... and be introduced to you as a potential new author let's say or some people do that to get marketing to other books that they've written. The idea is if they like the book that they got for free, then they're going to like other stuff that you have that might be ... you might charge for.

When you reach out to people to get your book for free, they're more likely to go and check it out, especially if they don't have to pay for it.

A lot of people, they contact reviewers and say, "Hey, today, my book is available for free. You can download it for free," and then they're more likely to download it, and then leave you a review.

Susan Friedmann: Obviously, here, we're talking about eBooks, and that obviously wouldn't work in the same way for a hard or softcover book, but your Book Review Targeter software, that doesn't matter whether it's an eBook or whether it's hard or a softback book, correct?

Debbie Drum: Correct, but most likely, we're going towards the digital people because they're able to go ahead, and get your book fairly quickly, and write you a review.

Susan Friedmann: Good. Tell us a little bit more about the software, what it would take to purchase this, how we can get a hold of it. Let the listeners know about that.

Debbie Drum: The URL that you would go to would be getbookreviewsnow.com/susan. That is where you'll find all the information, and you'll even find a demo of the tool and how it works. Basically, it's a web-based tool. The goal is to find other books related to your topic, and then literally just click a button to extract the email addresses. What the software does, it goes behind the scenes, takes a little bit of time. It's not like instantaneous. I know we live in this instant world, but we do have to abide by certain criteria that Amazon has when ... regarding us pulling data from their system.

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We want to be careful with that and not pull too much at one time as you could probably understand. It does take a couple minutes for that process to happen, but go for a walk. Go get a drink of water, and then by the time you get back, the reviewers' information will be there, and then you're ready to contact those people. Like we said before, that friendly message that you're going after.

Anything in life is a numbers game, so the more people that you contact, the more results you're going to get. You don't have to contact thousands and thousands of people, but it's better than contacting 10 people. If you contact a hundred people, then you're likely to get a very good response, and that's what the tool is giving you, the ability to literally have contact information for reviewers at your fingertips because if you were to do this annually, it would be impossible.

Susan Friedmann: Yeah, I know. Even that whole process of just searching out for reviewers in certain topics and just making notes of who those people are, and as you say, you can't necessarily find their information, so this is ingenious that you developed this tool. How much would authors be expected to pay for this?

Debbie Drum: It's definitely not something that I refer on my end is a set-and-forget kind of tool. This has actually taken a lot more time than I thought it would. Actually, when I developed it, it's okay though. For me, what those required on my end is really daily monitoring. Any time that you're working with a third-party system, you're abiding by third-party rules, right?

Any time Amazon wants to make a little change in their background, it could break our tool, so I am constantly talking with my programmer every single day. I'm constantly paying my programmer every single day, and it's my time too. This is not something that's going to be a \$47 tool. It's priced at \$197, which I think is very, very fair, and I don't even charge a yearly fee, which I probably should be because of the amount of resources that are needed on my end that is really a lot. I'll tell you that.

I want this in the hands of a lot of authors because I know that a lot of authors need this tool, and it's great for the community as well as a whole. I had to play around with the price a lot, but I think that the \$197 is a very, very fair price point, and hopefully, you understand the reasoning that it's not cheap because it takes a ton of my time in the background to make sure that this tool is working for everybody.

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- Susan Friedmann: Absolutely, and interestingly enough, we had Amy Collins on the ... as a guest mentor a few weeks ago, and she's big into the book publishing world, and she raved about this tool. She said she's seen things on the market and nothing touches this, and so it come very highly recommended. That's why I went out and bought it, so I know.
- Debbie Drum: Not an easy thing to build.
- Susan Friedmann: I bet.
- Debbie Drum: It's really not.
- Susan Friedmann: The thought that as you said that Amazon could be changing the algorithms of way of doing things all the time, and you've got to stay abreast of that, so ...
- Debbie Drum: Yeah. They'll do something like change the bio profile around like they'll just reorganize everything, and that will completely break the tool, so we have to go back in. We have to say, "Hey, what has Amazon done?" and then reconstruct our thing, so it's not fun, but I do it because I have passion for this, and I really want to help people. Yeah.
- Susan Friedmann: It's great. That's great. Give us the URL once more.
- Debbie Drum: That will be getbookreviewsnow.com/susan.
- Susan Friedmann: I will put that on the website as well. If you can leave our listeners with one nugget, one golden nugget of advice, what would that be, Debbie?
- Debbie Drum: Never stop creating. The second that you stopped putting your great content out there is the second that you fall deeper and deeper down, and you won't be able to be found by the people who you want to be found by. As hard as it is, every single day, you need to constantly be creating something that will attract people to you whether it's a video, whether it's a meme on social media, whether it's an article, blogpost, whatever it is, a podcast, right? You always need to be creating because that's how you're going to be found, and that is how you're going to grow your business.
- Susan Friedmann: That's fabulous. Thank you so much, and thank you all for taking precious time out of your day to listen to this interview, and I sincerely hope that it sparked some ideas you can use to sell more books. Here's wishing you much book marketing success.